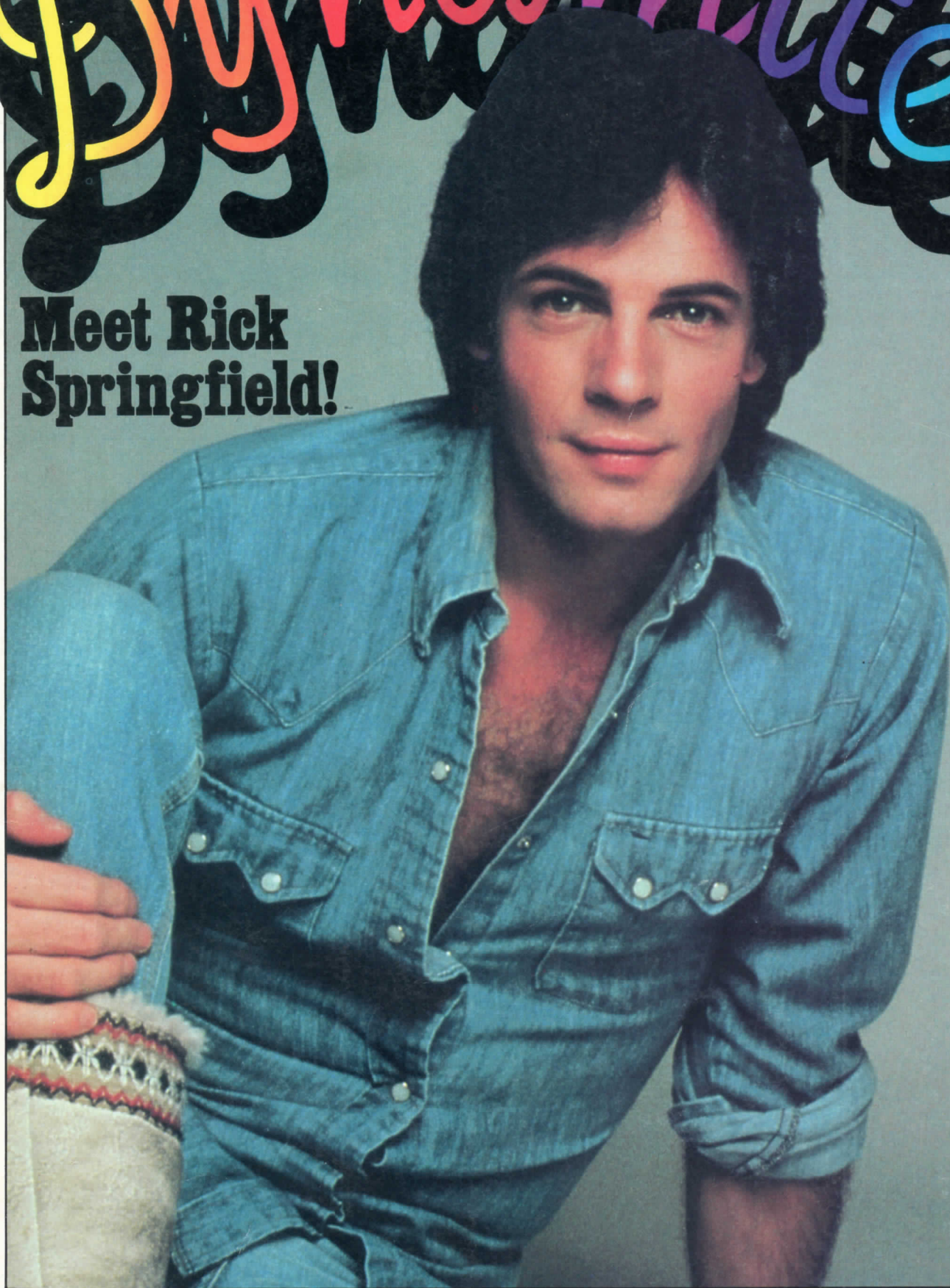


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these stories:

24. The Dark Crystal:

A sneak preview of
an exciting fantasy
film!



The Dark Crystal

A DYNAMITE SNEAK PREVIEW OF AN EXCITING FANTASY FILM

The world of *The Dark Crystal* is a strange and mysterious one. Trees walk, mountains move, and plants and rocks communicate in unseen ways. It's populated by weird creatures unlike any you've ever seen before. No humans walk in this beautiful and sometimes frightening world.

Where in the world is this weird world? The world of *The Dark Crystal* is currently located at a large movie studio outside London, England. *The Dark Crystal* is an exciting fantasy film being made by the people who made the Muppet movies, *Star Wars*, and *The Empire Strikes Back*. The movie won't be released until next summer, and work being done on it has been kept a closely guarded secret. The production has been closed to visitors, but *Dynamite's* Chip Lovitt was invited by the movie-makers for an exclusive, behind-the-scenes look at the making of this exciting fantasy film. Here's his report.

More than Muppets

"*The Dark Crystal* is quite easily the most challenging project we've ever done," Jim Henson, creator of the Muppets, told me. "I don't think anyone has done a film quite like this." *The Dark Crystal* will have no human actors, just life-size puppets.

Jim and another Muppeteer, Frank Oz, are directing the movie. Gary Kurtz, one of the forces behind *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, is co-producer.

The story of *The Dark Crystal* takes place in another world during another time. It's about Jen, an elflike creature called a Gelfling. Jen is the last of his race and his journey takes him from the Mystic

Jen, the hero of *The Dark Crystal*, meets Kira, another Gelfling; and a Fizgig, a friendly and furry monster, in a swamp.



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Years of work went into design and construction of the creatures' masks and costumes.



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Valley to the Great Castle of the Dark Crystal.

The Castle is the home of the Skekses, evil reptilian creatures who guard the Dark Crystal, a glowing stone which gives them their powers. They fear only one thing — a prediction that the Gelflings will someday destroy them. As a result, they've tried to wipe out all the Gelflings. Jen, however, was plucked from death by the Ur-Ru, a group of hermitlike mystics. Jen's mission is to find a special crystal and return it to its proper place. If Jen fails, all things whole and good will be destroyed. On his quest, Jen meets all kinds of weird creatures such as Pod People, a strange sorceress and keeper of secrets named Aughra, Mystics, and Garthim, fierce and frightening warriors who are covered in an armorlike shell.

One of a Kind

"This picture is unique in one sense," Gary Kurtz told me, "because of all the mechanical creatures. The fact that there are no human actors means you have many more problems. It's probably more complicated than any picture I've done." Kurtz's involvement grew out of the work Frank Oz and other Muppeteers did in creating Yoda in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

The Chamberlain of the Skekses, Evil Masters of the Dark Crystal, tries to steal the dying Emperor's sceptre.



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The characters in *The Dark Crystal* are all puppets, but are far more elaborate and spectacular than Yoda or the Muppets. Jim will be doing the character of Jen, and Frank Oz will do Aughra and other characters. The rest of the crew includes Muppeteers, special effects people, builders, and many more creative people.

The Birth of a Notion

The Dark Crystal grew out of an idea Jim Henson had about five years ago. "I wanted to do a fantasy film with all new characters. One of my earliest ideas was to create these really horrible reptilian-looking creatures who lived in a castle. After that, I saw some of fantasy artist Brian Froud's work, and I was immediately taken by his style," Jim recalled.

Froud joined the project and his sketches became the basis for the scenery and characters. It became the task of production designer Harry Lange to turn Froud's drawings into three-dimensional sets and scenery. Lange is highly qualified for the job. Before working on movies such as *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Superman*, and *Star Wars*, he worked for NASA, the space agency.

Work began more than three years ago on the new characters, their costumes, and masks. "The creature development and fabrication alone cost close to 4½ million dollars," Gary Kurtz said. The new characters are quite amazing. Unlike regular puppets, the ones in *The Dark Crystal* are equipped with special cables and radio controls that allow the creatures to move their eyes, ears, and mouths to and make all kinds of expressions! That makes them seem alive and real.

The years of work have certainly paid off. The beautiful sets, scenery, and creatures give a visitor the impression that he really has stepped into a dreamlike fantasy world. "This is a special project," Kurtz said. "It's been Jim's dream for years and years."

— Chip Lovitt